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(54) Title: ONLINE GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD

(57) Abstract:

ONLINE GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD

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Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a system and a method for providing interactive game play over an electronic network, more particularly to a system and a method for facilitating participation of subscribers in interactive game play over the Internet.

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Background of the Invention

The advent of global electronic networks such as the Internet facilitates on-line game play. Subscribers to the Internet can play on-line games by logging on to the Internet and accessing websites providing the on-line games. To participate in on-line games, the subscribers can use terminals, such as personal computers and/or any machine capable of 15 accessing the Internet.

Numerous interactive games are now available on diverse websites over the Internet. Because one measure of a website's worth is its popularity or its ability to attract visitors or 'hits' to their websites, it is advantageous for website providers to develop and offer websites which provide games or other attractions to entice subscribers to visit. In the present e-commerce environment, website servers earn fees from advertisers who advertise on the website. They also earn income from other website servers by providing hyperlinked access to the other website servers. When a subscriber jumps to the other website from the hyperlinked address, a fee is earned by the originating website server. Website servers often

fill its site content with banners or streaming advertisements to entice surfers to jump to the hyperlinked address. The longer a website server causes the subscriber to stay on its site, the more advertisements and hyperlinked vendors can be displayed to the subscriber, the more fees will likely be earned by the website server.

5 To enhance consumer loyalty, sellers of goods and services offer mileage or reward points which can be earned whenever a buyer purchases the goods or services. The mileage or points can be accumulated and used as credit toward future purchases. The mileage or point programs are widely used in the travel industry. In the casino industry, players at game tables continue to earn reward points by keeping play at a table.

10 Therefore, it would be advantageous to provide a website operating system that can facilitate participation of subscribers in a website providing on-line games. It would also be advantageous to provide a system that can facilitate the subscribers' participation in a website by providing other websites that are hyperlinked to the website and operated by sponsors of the website. It is also further desirable to provide a website which rewards a subscriber as the 15 subscriber interacts on the website.

Summary of the Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide a system and a method for facilitating participation of subscribers in a website provided over the Internet.

20 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system and a method for rewarding subscribers to the Internet for their participation in a website and other websites hyperlinked to the website.

To attain the above and other objects and advantages, a system of the present invention includes a website server connected to the electronic network for communicating with subscribers who access the website using terminals connected to the electronic network, having means for providing contents interactable by the subscriber on the website, wherein

5 the website server provides reward points to the subscriber based on the subscriber's interaction on the website. The website server may include a communication unit connected to the electronic network, for receiving subscriber information and entry information from a subscriber, wherein the subscriber information includes personal information of the subscriber and the entry information includes entries made by the subscriber to interact with

10 the contents on the website, an identifier receiving the subscriber information from the communication unit, for identifying the subscriber with the subscriber information, a counter receiving the entry information from the communication unit, for counting a number of the entries made by the subscriber to interact with the contents on the website, means for computing the reward points based on the number of the entries counted by the counter, and

15 means for crediting the reward points to the subscriber. The website server may also include a game server for storing various on-line games and for selectively providing the on-line games to the subscriber via the electronic network in response to the entry information received from the plurality of terminals, and a reward server for providing the subscriber with at least one of predetermined rewards based on an amount of the reward points received by the

20 subscriber.

The present invention also provides a method for facilitating participation of subscribers in a website provided over the Internet, including the steps of providing contents interactable by a subscriber on the website, identifying the subscriber interacting with the

contents on the website, counting a number representing the subscriber's interaction with the contents on the website, computing reward points based on the number of interactions, and crediting the reward points to the subscriber. The step of identifying includes the steps of receiving subscriber information to register the subscriber on the website, receiving 5 subscriber information to interact on the website from the subscriber, comparing the subscriber information to register and the subscriber information to interact, and determining identity between the subscriber information to register and the subscriber information to interact.

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become 10 apparent from the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments thereof, which is to be read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

This disclosure will present in detail the following description of preferred 15 embodiments with reference to the following figures wherein:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of a website operating system according the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a flow chart describing a method for operating websites according to the present invention;

20 Fig. 3 is a flowchart describing an example of registration and on-line game play according to the present invention;

Fig. 4 illustrates an example of a registration page of the website provided by an agent server of the present invention;

Fig. 5 illustrates an example of a home page of the website;
Figs. 6A and 6B illustrate an example of an on-line game provided on the website;
and
Fig. 7 is a flowchart describing an example of rewarding a subscriber according to the
5 present invention.

Description of Preferred Embodiments

This disclosure describes a system and a method for facilitating subscribers' participation and interaction in a website provided over an electronic network such as the 10 Internet. When a subscriber to the Internet interacts with contents on a website operated according to the present invention, the subscriber is rewarded for his/her interaction on the website. An interaction may be an entry (or click on a mouse) by the subscriber requesting a hyperlinked jump or response by a website server that operates the website. The reward may be, for example, electronic points (hereinafter "e-points") that can be accumulated and used 15 as credit toward future purchases of goods and/or services by the subscriber. The e-points may be exchanged for other types of rewards, for example, cash, coupons (or rebate checks), merchandise, or lottery tickets. The larger the number of times a subscriber interacts with contents on the website, the more e-points the subscriber can collect. While interacting on the website, a subscriber can participate in on-line game play including on-line lottery play 20 provided on the website. In this case, the subscriber may also earn the e-points depending on how long the subscriber interacts on the website to participate in the on-line game play. The earned e-points may also be accumulated and used as credit toward future purchases or exchanged for other types of rewards.

Referring to Fig. 1, a block diagram is illustrated for a preferred embodiment of a system for facilitating subscribers' interaction on a website according to the present invention. The system of the present invention includes subscriber terminals 10 each of which has a modem connected to an electronic network 30 so that subscribers can access the electronic network 30 such as the Internet, sponsor terminals 20 each of which also has a modem connected to the electronic network 30 and receives information from sponsors of a website, and a website server 40 for communicating with the subscriber terminals 10 and the sponsor terminals 20 via the electronic network 30 to facilitate the subscribers' interaction on the website.

A subscriber terminal 12 may be a personal computer, a local terminal, or any machine capable of accessing the Internet. Local terminals may be located at places to which the subscribers can readily access, for example, retail stores and shops. The sponsor terminals 20 are located at business places of the sponsors of the website. The sponsors also have their own websites that are hyperlinked to the originating website provided by the website server 40. The sponsors may be vendors who offer merchandise and/or coupons for use of rewards for the subscribers who interact on the website.

The website server 40 preferably includes a communication unit 42 for providing a communication path between the website server 40 and the electronic network 30, a game server 46 for storing various on-line games and providing the on-line games on the website under control of a data process unit 44, an interaction counter 51 and a time counter 52 for counting the number of entries made by a subscriber and a time period for which a subscriber interacts on the website, respectively, an identifier 50 for identifying each subscriber accessing the website, an subscriber database 53 for storing subscriber information of

subscribers including personal information of each subscriber and account information of e-points and credits earned by the respective subscribers, a reward server 54 for selectively providing various types of rewards to the subscribers based on an amount of the e-points collected by each subscriber, a sponsor database 56 for storing and updating information of 5 the sponsors of the website, and a coupon server 58 for issuing to the subscribers coupons and/or rebate checks that are used for future purchases of goods and services by the subscribers. A detailed description of the website server 40 in Fig. 1 follows.

When a subscriber at a subscriber terminal 12 logs on to the website provided by the website server 40, the subscriber is provided with a registration page on a screen of the 10 subscriber terminal 12. The subscriber enters subscriber information including his/her personal information such as name, address, and password in prepared boxes of the registration page displayed on the screen. The registration page is prepared by the website server 40 to facilitate registration of subscribers on the website. When the subscriber enters the subscriber information on the registration page, the subscriber information is transmitted 15 to the website server 40 via the electronic network 30 and is stored in the subscriber database 53 under control of the data process unit 44. An account is established for the subscriber in the subscriber database 53. Thereby, the subscriber is registered on the website, and upon the registration, the subscriber may be rewarded for his/her interaction on the website with the e-points or other types of rewards. The e-points, whenever being rewarded, are deposited 20 automatically in the account of the subscriber.

When a subscriber accessing the website enters subscriber information including his/her personal information such as name and password, the subscriber information is transmitted to the communication unit 42 of the website server 40 via the electronic network

30. Upon receiving the subscriber information, the communication unit 42 transfers the subscriber information to the identifier 50 under control of the data process unit 44. The communication unit 42 may adopt TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) as a communication protocol. TCP/IP uses a client-server model of communication in which 5 a client (i.e., the subscriber terminal 12) requests and is provided a service (such as sending a Web page) by another computer (i.e., the server 40) in a network.

The data process unit 44 then enables the identifier 50 to identify the subscriber with the received subscriber information. For the identification, the identifier 50 can access the subscriber database 53 under control of the data process unit 44 and retrieve subscriber 10 information that is previously entered by subscribers at the time of registration on the website and stored in the subscriber database 53. The identifier 50 compares the received subscriber information with the corresponding subscriber information previously stored in the subscriber database 53 to determine identity between the two types of subscriber information. With respect to subscribers successfully identified by the identifier 50, the data process unit 44 15 enables the reward server 54 to reward each subscriber for his/her interaction on the website.

When interacting with contents on the website, a subscriber makes an entry (or a mouse click) to visit an hyperlinked site or an entry requesting response by the website server 40. Information of such entries by the subscriber is transmitted to the website server 40 via the Internet 30. In the website server 40, the communication unit 42 receives the entry 20 information entered by the subscriber. Upon receiving the entry information, the data process unit 44 enables the interaction counter 51 to count the number of entries made by the subscriber to interact on the website, e.g., entries or clicks on contents on the website. The number of such entries requiring a response from the server is counted by the interaction

counter 51 and the number is converted into an e-point by the data process unit 44. Such conversion may be implemented by use of a conversion table (or a formula) stored in the data process unit 44. With the conversion table, an e-point is automatically calculated from the number counted by the interaction counter 51. Basically, the larger the number of times the subscriber interacts on the website, the more e-points the subscriber can collect.

5 Alternatively, depending on the types of interactions made, the number of e-points awarded may vary. For example, e-points may be awarded only to a winner of an interactive game involving multiple players, such as football or air hockey. An e-point collected by the subscriber is deposited in an account of the subscriber in the subscriber database 53. Under 10 control of the data process unit 44, the account may be updated by accumulating the e-points collected by the subscriber. The subscriber can check his/her e-points balance at any time using, for example, his/her password, and redeem the e-points for rewards.

Upon receiving a request for redemption of the e-points from the subscriber, the reward server 54 provides the subscriber with various types of rewards, such as credits, cash, 15 coupons (or rebate checks), merchandise, and lottery tickets. The subscriber may make choices among the rewards. The amount or value of reward to the subscriber is determined based on the amount of the e-point collected in the subscriber's account. Such rewards may be offered by sponsors of the website. The sponsors may operate their own websites that are hyperlinked to the originating website provided by the website server 40. The sponsor 20 database 56 stores information of the sponsors offering the rewards. When communicating with the sponsor terminals 20, the data process unit 44 accesses the sponsor database 56 to save and retrieve information of the sponsors. For example, if the subscriber chooses credit as a reward for the collected e-point, the subscriber earns the credit toward future purchases of

goods or merchandise provided by the sponsors. The subscriber can make the purchases with the credit on the hyperlinked websites of the sponsors. The credit may also be stored in the subscriber database 53 to update a credit account of the subscriber.

The coupon server 58 issues coupons under control of the data process unit 44 if the 5 subscriber chooses coupons as a reward for the collected e-point. The coupons may be offered by the sponsors of the website. The subscriber may purchase goods or services provided by the sponsors with the coupons. Preferably, the coupon server 58 transmits virtual coupons to the subscriber terminal 12 via the Internet 30. In this case, the subscriber can print out the virtual coupons at the subscriber terminal 12 (preferably, a personal computer with a 10 printer) and use the printed coupons to purchase goods or services at available shops.

Alternatively, the subscriber may directly use the virtual coupons if the subscriber purchases goods or services on the hyperlinked websites of the sponsors. More preferably, the coupon server 58 may have bar-code data for issuing bar-coded coupons. Each coupon issued by the coupon server 58 is unique to the subscriber who chooses coupon as a reward for the 15 collected e-point. When the coupon server 58 issues a coupon to the subscriber, the data process unit 44 accesses and retrieves the identity of the subscriber from the identifier 50 and provides the subscriber's identity to the coupon server 58. Thus, the coupon server 58 can issue a bar-coded coupon unique to the subscriber.

Game server 46 stores various on-line games and provides the on-line games to the 20 subscriber terminals 10 under control of the data process unit 44. The entry information entered by a subscriber at a subscriber terminal 12 may include game information requesting on-line game play. The game information may designate a specific on-line game or request all the on-line games available on the website from which the subscriber can choose. Upon

receiving the game information from the subscriber terminal 12 through the Internet 30 and the communication unit 42, the data process unit 44 enables the game server 46 to provide a corresponding on-line game to the subscriber terminal 12. As soon as the game server 46 provides the on-line game to the subscriber terminal 12, the time counter 52 counts a time 5 period for which the subscriber interacts on the website to play the on-line game.

The on-line games provided by the game server 46 may be simply games for fun, skill-based games (e.g., Jeopardy, Trivia Pursuit, etc.), and/or consideration-based games wherein players pay to play and receive monetary or prize awards upon winning. The skill-based games are preferably progressively changed in levels of difficulty. For example, as a 10 subscriber proceeds to higher levels in playing the game, the more skill is required on the part of the subscriber to play. In such case, the subscriber is preferably awarded e-points based on the amount of time or interactions with the on-line game. In the consideration-based games, the subscriber's ranking or score in the game may affect the amount of e-points in addition to the winning awarded to the winner. Preferably, e-points are also awarded to every subscriber 15 who participates in the on-line game based on time or amount of interaction.

The game server 46 may also provide an on-line game in which multiple subscribers can participate simultaneously and compete with each other. In this case, a winner of the game may be determined based on scores that all the participating subscribers have obtained at a specified time set by the subscribers or the game server 46. For example, a winner of the 20 game is a subscriber who has obtained the highest score in the game. The winner is rewarded with the highest prize of the game, and the other subscribers are also rewarded based on their scores in the game. Alternatively, total prize of the game may be rewarded only to a winner of the game.

The website server 40 may also include a lottery server 48 for providing on-line lottery play to the subscriber terminals 10 via the Internet 30. The entry information entered by a subscriber may include lottery information requesting on-line lottery play. Upon receiving the lottery information transmitted from the subscriber via the Internet 30 and the 5 communication unit 42, the data process unit 44 enables the lottery server 48 to provide the subscriber with on-line lottery games in accordance with the lottery information. The lottery server 48 stores various types of on-line lottery games including governmental on-line lottery games offered by the state. The subscriber may choose a specific type of on-line lottery game at the time of entering the lottery information, or choose from all the on-line lottery games 10 available on the website. The subscriber can play on-line lottery games at a subscriber terminal 12 where the subscriber interacts on the website.

The lottery server 48 preferably provides the subscriber with virtual lottery tickets that are displayed on a screen of the subscriber terminal 12. With the virtual lottery tickets displayed on the screen, the subscriber may participate in lottery play. For example, the 15 subscriber can pick lottery numbers by entering the corresponding numbers in prepared boxes on each of the virtual lottery tickets, or the subscriber can pick 'quick' numbers that are randomly selected and automatically entered by the lottery server 48 in the prepared boxes of each virtual lottery ticket. Upon choosing lottery numbers for all the virtual lottery tickets displayed on the screen of the terminal 12, the subscriber enters an instruction to draw a 20 winning number, for example, clicking a corresponding button on the screen. Upon receiving the instruction from the subscriber via the Internet 30, the lottery server 48 draws a winning number that is a series of numbers randomly drawn by the lottery server 48. If an on-line lottery game is governed by other entity, a winning number for the lottery game is drawn by

the entity governing the lottery game. For example, a winning number for a governmental lottery game is drawn by the state.

The drawn winning number is displayed on the same screen as the virtual lottery tickets are displayed. By comparing each drawn numbers of the winning number and the 5 lottery numbers of each virtual lottery ticket, the subscriber can recognize matches between the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers. The subscriber may also be notified of the matches by the lottery server 48. The prizes for the lottery game may vary depending on the number of matches between the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers. For example, if there are matches between all the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers, the subscriber is 10 rewarded with the highest prize of the lottery game.

A more detailed description of a system for playing on-line lottery games is described in a commonly assigned U.S. application, Serial no. 09/459,293 (attorney docket no. 8438-210) filed on December 10, 1999. The disclosure of which is incorporated by reference herein.

15 While the subscriber interacts on the website for participating in the on-line game play and/or the on-line lottery play, the data process unit 44 enables the time counter 52 to count a time period of the subscriber's interaction on the website. For example, the time counter 52 counts a time period for which the subscriber participates in an on-line game. The counted time period is converted into an e-point by the data process unit 44. Basically, the 20 longer the subscriber participates in an on-line game or an on-line lottery play, the more e-points the subscriber can collect. The collected e-points are deposited in the subscriber's account in the subscriber database 53 and become a basis in determining a reward to the subscriber for the interaction on the website.

Referring to Fig. 2, a flow chart describes a method for facilitating subscribers' interaction on a website according to the present invention. The website is provided over the Internet and rewards a subscriber for his/her interaction with contents on the website. The subscriber is preferably rewarded with e-points that can be accumulated and used as credit 5 toward future purchases of goods and/or services. A detailed description of the method of the present invention follows.

Upon logging on to the Internet, a subscriber can access the website providing various attractions including on-line game play over the Internet (step 202). The on-line game play may include on-line lottery play provided over the Internet. If the subscriber is a new visitor 10 to the website, the subscriber may register on the website by submitting his/her personal information, such as name and password, to a server providing the website. The server may also establish a new account for the new visitor who has registered on the website.

Upon accessing the website to interact with contents thereon, the subscriber can enter his/her subscriber information including the personal information. With the entered 15 subscriber information, the server identifies the subscriber (step 204). For example, the server compares the subscriber's personal information included in the entered subscriber information with the personal information entered by the subscriber for his/her registration on the website, and determines whether the two types of personal information are identical. The server may reward the subscriber who is successfully identified, for his/her interaction on the website.

20 While interacting on the website, the subscriber may make mouse clicks or enters information to interact with contents on the website (step 206). The subscriber may also jump to websites hyperlinked to the originating website or make a request for response on the website. The subscriber may also request on-line game play to participate in one or more on-

line games. When the subscriber makes such entries requiring response from the server operating the website, the number of entries made by the subscriber is counted (step 208). Alternatively, while the subscriber interacts on the website for playing on-line games, a time period of the subscriber's interaction on the website is counted (step 208). For example, the 5 server counts an overall time period during which the subscriber interacts on the website to make entries and/or to participate in on-line game play. To continue counting the time, the subscriber need to continuously interact on the website without a recess exceeding a predetermined time period. That is, if the subscriber does not make any interaction (e.g., an entry or a click) on the website for a predetermined time period, the server automatically 10 stops counting the time.

A further alternative in tabulating e-point may be an award only to the winner of multiple player games. When multiple players participate in an on-line game, a winner of the game is determined based on his/her ranking or score in the game against those of other players who have participated in the game. The winner is then rewarded with a predetermined 15 prize and/or a certain amount of e-points.

Upon the subscriber leaving the website or periodically, the server computes an e-point from the counted number of entries and/or the counted time period (step 210). The amount of the e-point is proportional to the amount of the counted number and/or time period. That is, the subscriber can earn more e-points as the subscriber interacts more 20 frequently on the website or for a longer time period. The e-point earned by the subscriber can be redeemed for certain types of rewards such as credit, cash, coupons, and/or lottery tickets. The types of the rewards may be selected according to the subscriber's preference.

If the subscriber chooses credit as a reward for the e-point (step 212), the subscriber is provided with the credit toward future purchases of goods and services offered by sponsors of the website (step 214). The sponsors may have their own websites that are hyperlinked to the originating website on which the subscriber is rewarded. Hence, the subscriber can purchase 5 goods and services offered by the sponsors on the hyperlinked websites provided by the sponsors. Upon rewarding the subscriber with the credit, the server may update a credit account of the subscriber with the rewarded credit (step 216).

If the subscriber chooses cash as a reward for the e-point (step 218), the subscriber is provided with, for example, a check equivalent to the e-point (step 220). The server may set a 10 predetermined amount of money for a certain amount of e-point. If the subscriber chooses coupons as a reward for the e-point (step 222), the server issues coupons equivalent to the e-point to the subscriber (step 224). Like in the credit, the subscriber can use the coupons for future purchases of goods and services. The coupons may be provided to the subscriber via a mail or the Internet. If receiving via the Internet, the subscriber can print out the coupons 15 using his/her personal computer accessing the Internet. The coupons may also be offered by the sponsors of the website.

If the subscriber chooses lottery play as a reward for the e-point (step 226), the subscriber is provided with lottery tickets equivalent to the e-point via mail or the Internet. If receiving lottery tickets via the Internet, the subscriber can print out the lottery tickets using 20 his/her personal computer accessing the Internet (step 228). The server may also provide the subscriber with on-line lottery play via the Internet, so that the subscriber can play on-line lottery games at a terminal accessing the Internet. That is, the server provides the subscriber with virtual lottery tickets displayed on a screen of the terminal. Then, the subscriber may

play on-line lottery games with the virtual lottery tickets. The on-line lottery games may include governmental on-line lottery games governed by the state. During an on-line lottery game, the subscriber may pick lottery numbers for each of the virtual lottery tickets by entering the numbers in each virtual lottery ticket on the screen. The server or entity

5 governing the on-line lottery game draws winning numbers for each virtual lottery ticket, and the server determines matches between the winning numbers and the lottery numbers picked by the subscriber for each lottery ticket. The server then rewards the subscriber with a predetermined prize if any virtual lottery ticket has matching numbers. The prize may vary depending on how many matching numbers the virtual lottery ticket has.

10 A more detailed description of a method for playing on-line lottery games is disclosed in the above-mentioned U.S. application, Serial no. 09/459,293 (attorney docket no. 8438-210) filed on December 10, 1999. The disclosure of which is incorporated by reference herein.

15 Besides the above types of rewards such as credit, cash, coupons, and lotteries, the subscriber may also be provided with other types of rewards at his/her choices, for example, merchandise, rebate checks, and so on. If the subscriber does not choose to redeem the e-points for a certain type of reward, the server automatically update an e-point account of the subscriber with the collected e-points (step 230). Thus, the e-point account stores an accumulated e-points balance of the subscriber.

20 An exemplary description of playing on-line games and receiving e-points as a reward follows.

Referring to Fig. 3, upon logging on to the website providing on-line games, a subscriber can access a home page of the website. The home page may have various contents

including hyperlinks to jump to other pages of the website and hyperlinks to jump to other websites. The hyperlinks to other websites may be "banners" of the Internet retailers and sponsors associated with the website. In order to interact with such contents on the website, the subscriber is required to register and be a member of the website. If the subscriber has not 5 registered on the website, the subscriber can go to a registration page of the website by clicking a corresponding hyperlink. The subscriber becomes a member of the website by electronically submitting a registration form provided on the registration page on the website. An example of a registration page is shown in Fig. 4.

Referring to Fig. 4, a registration page of the website has a brief member 10 questionnaire with blanks to be filled by the subscriber. The member questionnaire may request the subscriber to provide his/her information, such as e-mail address, name, date of birth, gender, address, telephone number, and so on. The subscriber may also be requested on the member questionnaire to make his/her own password. The subscriber may fill in the "password" blank with certain characters and/or numbers chosen for his/her password, and 15 also fill in the "confirm password" blank with the same characters and/or numbers. By filling in the "password" and "confirm password" blanks, the subscriber may create his/her own password to be used on the website. The member questionnaire also includes a "password hint" blank where the subscriber may enter any words associated with the password that he/she has created. The password hint may be used to help the subscriber remember his/her 20 password. In the member questionnaire, some information such as gender and telephone number may be optional so that the subscriber may skip the optional questionnaire. Address information may be used to confirm the subscriber's place of residence so as to determine whether the subscriber's residence is within the certain states. Telephone number information

as well as the address information may be used to contact to the subscriber if he/she wins in the games provided on the website.

Referring again to Fig. 3, if the subscriber has registered on the website, he/she may log in to the website by entering user ID (identification) and password that he created at the 5 time of registration. The subscriber's e-mail address may also be used as his/her user ID. Upon successfully logging in to the website, the subscriber is allowed to interact with contents in a home page (or a predetermined starting page) of the website. Fig. 5 shows an example of the home page having various contents with which the subscriber interacts to play games and to receive rewards. Referring to Fig. 5, the contents on the page include hyperlinks 10 of "games", "prizes", "e-points", and "winners" which are most frequently interacted by subscribers to play games and to get rewards. The contents may have hyperlinks to jump to other interesting websites or pages and also have information pages providing description of services on the website. The contents may also include advertising banners hyperlinked to retailers and sponsors associated with the website. By clicking a banner of the contents, the 15 subscriber may jump to a website of an advertising retailer and interact with contents on the website of the retailer to purchase goods and/or services from the retailer.

Referring to Fig. 3 again, upon accessing the home page of the website, the subscriber can jump to a game page to play games by clicking the "games" hyperlink. The game page may have a game menu where various games each having a title and/or a brief description are 20 displayed. The subscriber can choose a game to play from the game menu. For example, if choosing a lotto game by clicking a corresponding hyperlink on the game menu, the subscriber jumps to a page providing the lotto game. Fig. 6A and 6B show a lotto game as an example of the games available on the game menu of the website.

Referring to Fig. 6A, the lotto game page provides a virtual lottery ticket on which the subscriber can enter information such as lottery play numbers and a date of play. The subscriber may choose play numbers using a number pad (not shown) provided on the lotto game page or click "quick pick" button for a set of randomly generated numbers. The 5 subscriber may also choose the date on which the subscriber would like to play. When the subscriber is satisfied with the play numbers, he/she may click "submit" button so that winning numbers are drawn and announced on the date chosen. Alternatively, instead of clicking the "submit" button, the subscriber may be required to click an advertising banner on the page. In other words, the subscriber may submit his/her lottery ticket by clicking a banner 10 to jump to a hyperlinked website of a retailer or a sponsor. Referring to Fig. 6B, upon successfully submitting the lottery ticket, the subscriber receives a ticket confirmation number and ticket information. A prize for the winning may be specified on the ticket and/or the ticket information, and it may be a certain amount of e-points. Thus, the subscriber may earn e-points by winning on games provided on the website as well as by interacting with 15 contents on the website as described above.

Referring again to Fig. 3, upon successfully accessing the home page of the website, the subscriber may click "e-points" hyperlink to jump to a page relating to redemption of e-points earned by the subscriber. As shown in Fig. 7, the subscriber may have choices in the redemption of his/her e-points, such as redemption for money or for merchandise. If the 20 subscriber chooses to be redeemed with money, the subscriber may be asked for his/her confidential password and other member information and it may be determined whether the amount of the subscriber's e-points is over a certain amount of redeemable minimum. If the amount of the subscriber's e-points is equal to or over the minimum, the subscriber's

redemption amount is delivered to the subscriber via check in a certain time period. If the amount of the subscriber's e-points is less than the minimum, the subscriber receives a message informing insufficient e-points for the money redemption. The subscriber may also choose to redeem his/her e-points for merchandise. In this case, the subscriber may receive, 5 for example, rebate checks in accordance with his/her redemption amount on goods and services offered by the Internet retailers hyperlinked with the website. The subscriber may also choose a category of merchandise for the redemption, and further choose more specified types of merchandise within the category chosen. Each of the specified types of merchandise displays URL (Uniform Resource Locator) addresses of various retailers. Since the URL addresses are hyperlinked with the website, the subscriber can directly jump to a website of 10 his/her favorite or interesting retailer by clicking a corresponding one of the URL addresses. On the website of a retailer chosen, the subscriber may order goods or services of which value is equal to or less than his/her redemption amount, or the subscriber may receive a discount as much as the redemption amount.

15 Having described the preferred embodiments of the system and method for facilitating subscribers' interaction on a website according to the present invention, it is noted that modifications and variations can be made by persons skilled in the art in light of the above teachings. For example, although the preferred embodiments are described with respect to one subscriber, the present invention applies to multiple subscribers who log on to the 20 Internet and interact on the website simultaneously. That is, the present invention facilitates the interaction of the multiple subscribers on the website by simultaneously rewarding the e-points or other types of rewards to the respective subscribers for their interaction on the website.

It is therefore to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the present invention can be practiced in a manner other than as specifically described herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for facilitating interaction by subscribers on a website provided over an electronic network, comprising the steps of:
 3. providing contents interactable by a subscriber on the website;
 4. identifying the subscriber interacting with the contents on the website;
 5. counting a number representing the subscriber's interaction with the contents on the website;
 7. computing reward points based on the number of interactions; and
 8. crediting the reward points to the subscriber.
1. 2. The method as defined in claim 1, further including the step of rewarding the subscriber with at least one of predetermined rewards of which value is determined based on an amount of the reward points.
1. 3. The method as defined in claim 2, wherein the predetermined rewards are offered by sponsors of the website, each of the sponsors having a website hyperlinked to the website on which the subscriber is rewarded.
1. 2. 4. The method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of identifying includes the steps of:
 3. receiving subscriber information to register the subscriber on the website;
 4. receiving subscriber information to interact on the website from the subscriber;

5 comparing the subscriber information to register and the subscriber information to
6 interact; and
7 determining identity between the subscriber information to register and the subscriber
8 information to interact.

1 5. The method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of counting includes
2 counting a time period for which the subscriber interacts on the website, when the subscriber
3 interacts on the website to participate in on-line game play.

1 6. The method as defined in claim 5, wherein the on-line game play includes on-
2 line lottery play provided over the electronic network.

1 7. The method as defined in claim 5, further including the step of computing
2 reward points based on the time period.

1 8. The method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of crediting the reward
2 points includes updating an account of the subscriber with the reward points.

1 9. A system for facilitating interaction by subscribers on a website provided over
2 an electronic network, comprising:
3 a website server connected to the electronic network for communicating with
4 subscribers who access the website using terminals connected to the electronic network,
5 having means for providing contents interactable by the subscriber on the website, wherein

6 the website server provides reward points to the subscriber based on the subscriber's
7 interaction on the website.

1 10. The system as defined in claim 9, wherein the website server includes:
2 a communication unit connected to the electronic network, for receiving subscriber
3 information and entry information from a subscriber, wherein the subscriber information
4 includes personal information of the subscriber and the entry information includes entries
5 made by the subscriber to interact with the contents on the website;
6 an identifier receiving the subscriber information from the communication unit, for
7 identifying the subscriber with the subscriber information;
8 a counter receiving the entry information from the communication unit, for counting a
9 number of the entries made by the subscriber to interact with the contents on the website;
10 means for computing the reward points based on the number of the entries counted by
11 the counter; and
12 means for crediting the reward points to the subscriber.

1 11. The system as defined in claim 10, wherein the identifier includes means for
2 comparing the subscriber information entered by the subscriber upon accessing the website
3 with information previously entered by the subscriber at the time of registration on the
4 website.

1 12. The system as defined in claim 10, wherein the counter counts a time period
2 for which the subscriber interacts on the website, when the subscriber interacts to participate
3 in on-line game play.

1 13. The system as defined in claim 12, wherein the on-line game play includes on-
2 line lottery play provided over the electronic network.

1 14. The system as defined in claim 12, further including a game server for storing
2 various on-line games and for selectively providing the on-line games to the subscriber via
3 the electronic network in response to the entry information received from the subscriber.

1 15. The system as defined in claim 10, further including a reward server for
2 providing the subscriber with at least one of predetermined rewards based on an amount of
3 the reward points received by the subscriber.

1 16. The system as defined in claim 15, wherein the predetermined rewards are
2 offered by sponsors of the website, each of the sponsors having a website hyperlinked to the
3 website on which the subscriber originally interacts.

1 17. The system as defined in claim 1, wherein the electronic network is the
2 Internet.

1 18. A system for facilitating interaction by subscribers on a website provided over
2 an electronic network connected with terminals at which the subscribers access the website,
3 the system comprising:
4 a communication unit connected to the terminals via the electronic network, for
5 receiving subscriber information and entry information entered by a subscriber at a terminal,
6 wherein the subscriber information includes personal information of the subscriber and the
7 entry information includes entries made by the subscriber to interact with contents on the
8 website;
9 an identifier receiving the subscriber information from the communication unit, for
10 identifying the subscriber by comparing the subscriber information entered by the subscriber
11 upon accessing the website with information previously entered by the subscriber to register
12 on the website;
13 a counter receiving the entry information from the communication unit, for counting a
14 number of the entries made by the subscriber to interact with the contents on the website;
15 a data process unit receiving the number of entries counted by the counter, for
16 computing reward points based on the number of entries received from the counter; and
17 a reward server receiving the reward points computed by the data process unit, for
18 providing the subscriber identified by the identifier with at least one of predetermined
19 rewards based on an amount of the reward points received from the data process unit.

1 19. The system as defined in claim 18, further including a game server for storing
2 various on-line games and for selectively providing the on-line games to the subscriber via
3 the electronic network in response to the entry information received from the subscriber via
4 the electronic network.

1 20. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the counter counts a time period
2 for which the subscriber interacts on the website, when the subscriber interacts on the website
3 to play at least one of the on-line games provided by the game server

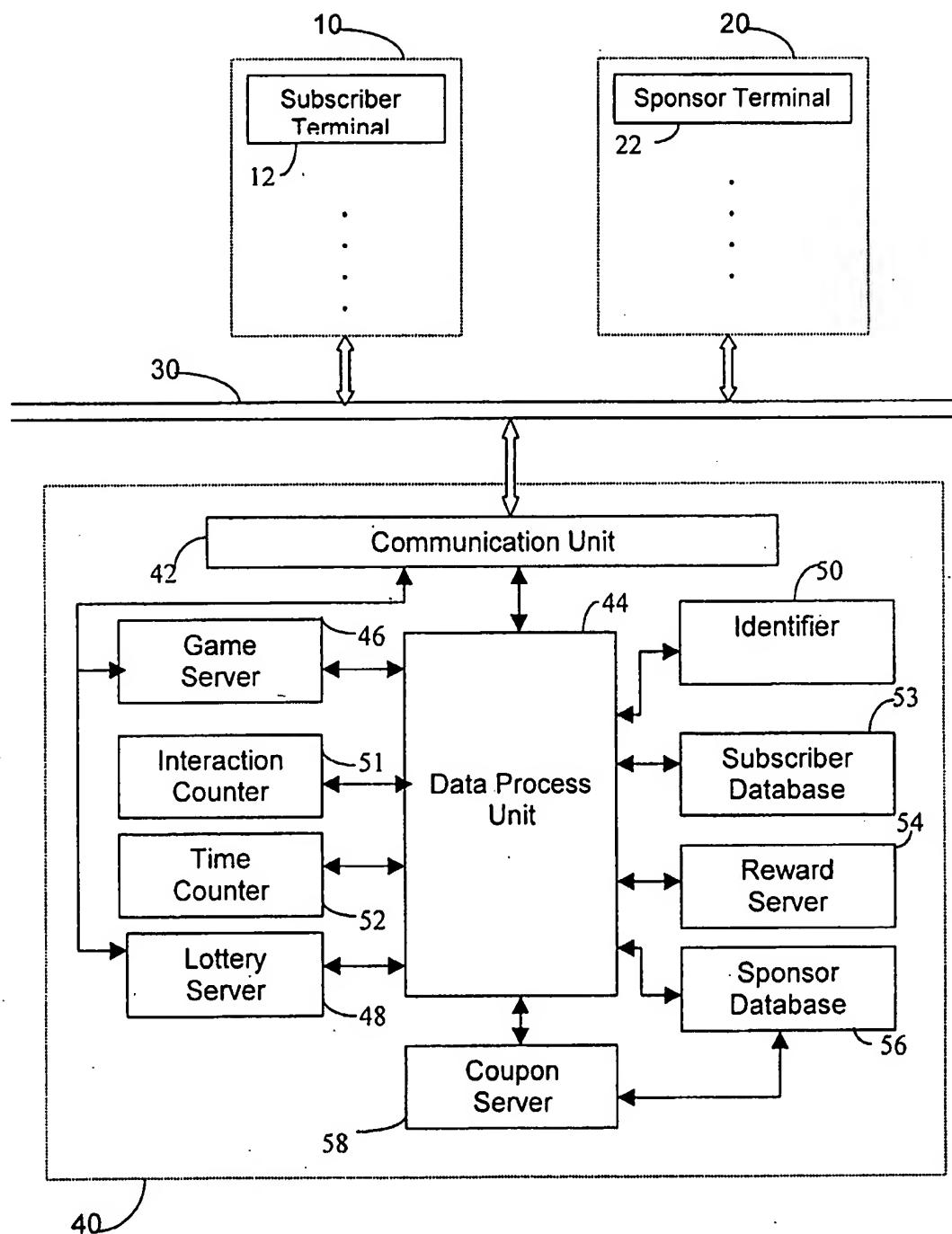


Fig. 1

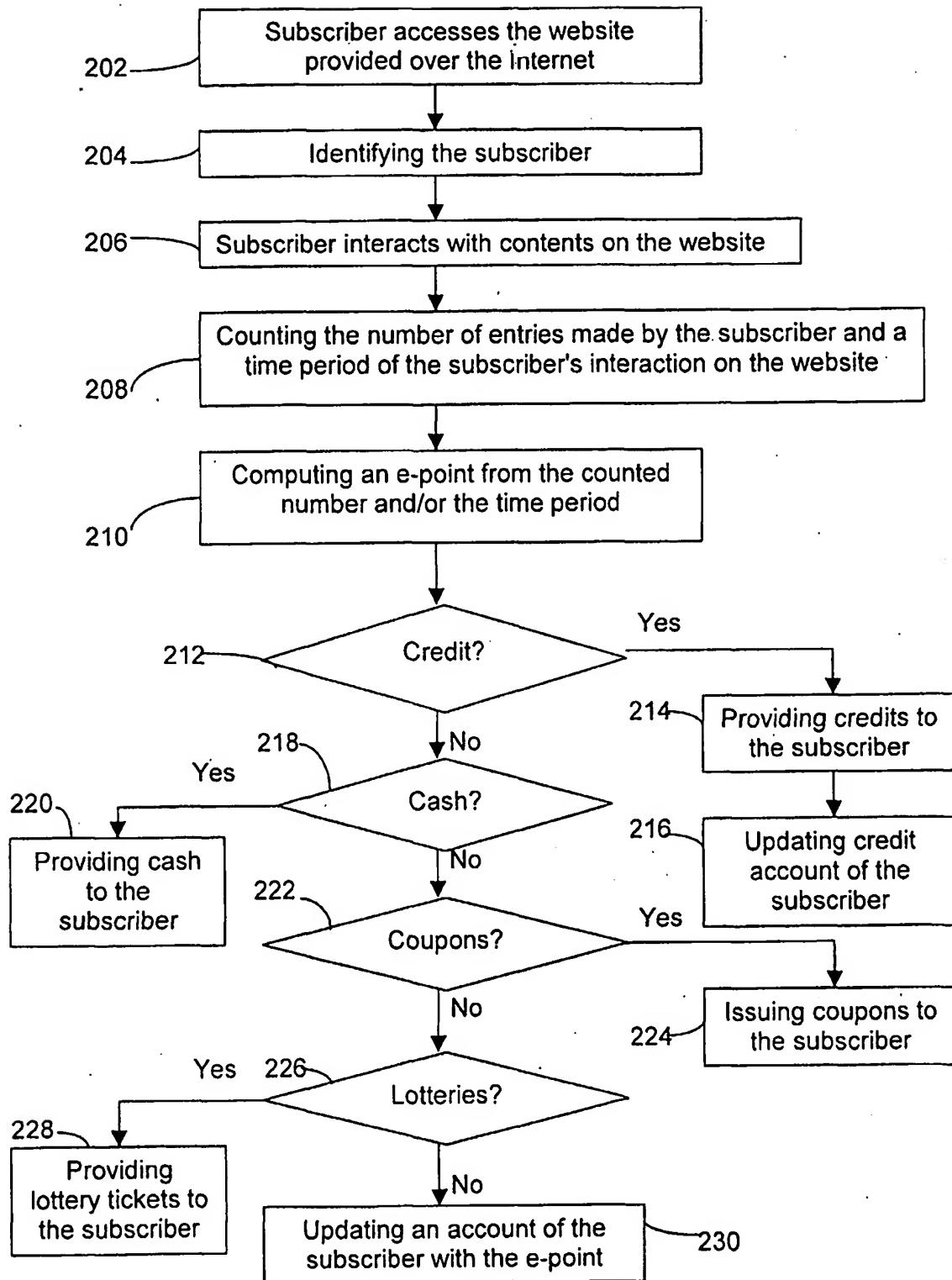
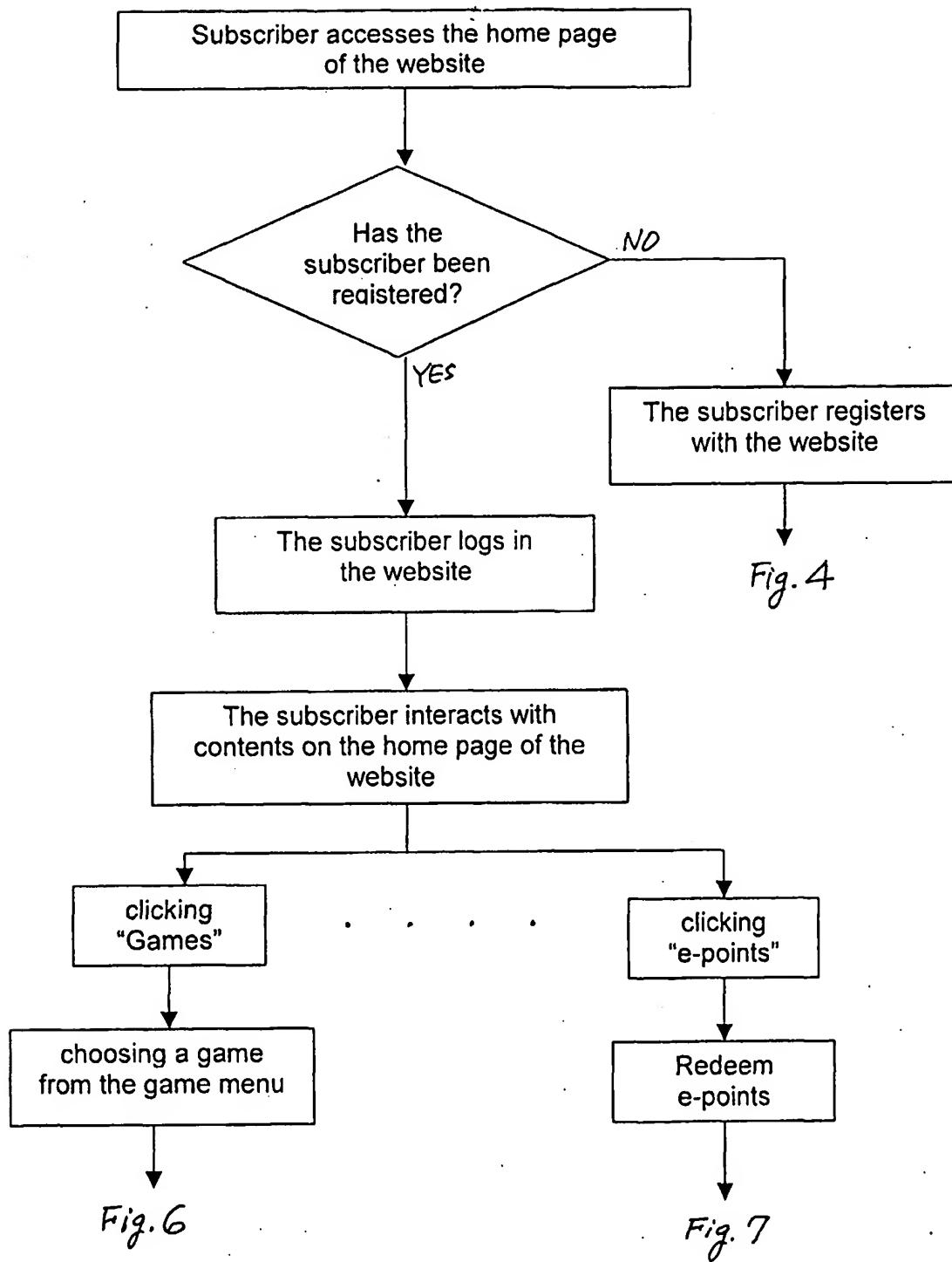


Fig. 2



WELCOME TO E-LOTTERY WEBSITE!**E-LOTTERY WEBSITE MEMBERSHIP**
(Please fill in the followings)

E-MAIL ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
PASSWORD	<input type="text"/>
CONFIRM PASSWORD	<input type="text"/>
PASSWORD HINT	<input type="text"/>
FIRST NAME	<input type="text"/>
MIDDLE NAME	<input type="text"/>
LAST NAME	<input type="text"/>
DATE OF BIRTH	<input type="text"/>
GENDER	<input type="text"/>
ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
TELEPHONE NO.	<input type="text"/>

Fig. 4

E-LOTTERY WEBSITE

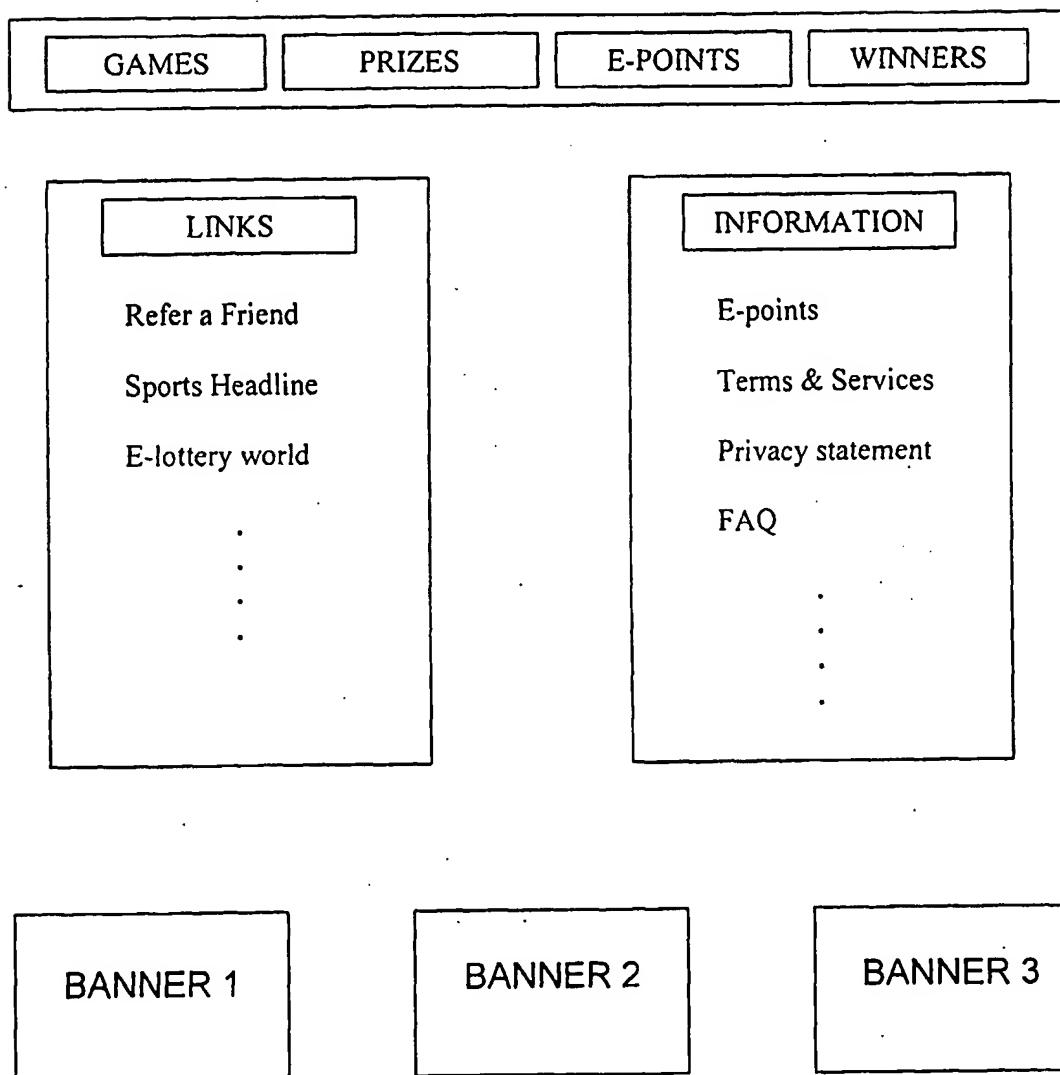


Fig. 5

PICK 3 LOTTO GAMES

Quick Pick

TYPE OF BET

PRIZE AMOUNT 5000 e-points

Choose the day on
Which you'd like to
Play:

MON 3-13-00
 TUE 3-14-00
 WED 3-15-00
 THU 3-16-00

Submit Ticket

Fig. 6A

TICKET CONFIRMATION NUMBER 1 2 3 4 5 6**YOUR TICKET INFORMATION**

Bet Type	Played No.	Winning No.	Prize
Straight	7 8 9		5000 e-points

This confirmation number is valid for the drawing to be held
on Monday 3-13-00 at 6:00 PM.

Fig. 6B

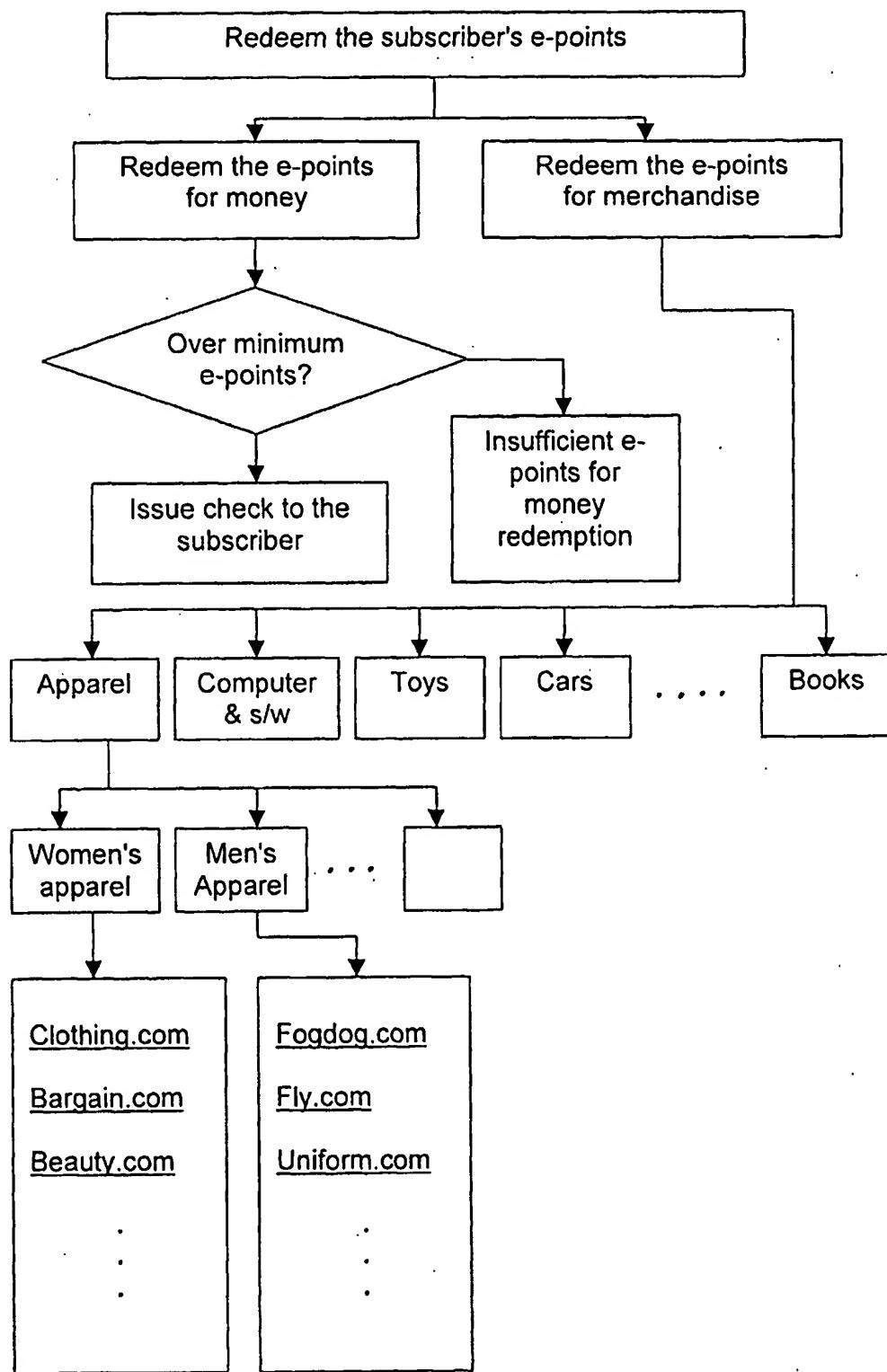


Fig. 7

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 8438-207 PCT	IMPORTANT DECLARATION	Date of mailing(day/month/year) 22/06/2001
International application No. PCT/US 01/08755	International filing date(day/month/year). 19/03/2001	(Earliest) Priority date(day/month/year) 17/03/2000
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC		G06F17/60
Applicant ELOTTERY, INC.		

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that **no International search report will be established on the international application for the reasons indicated below**

1. The subject matter of the international application relates to:
 - a. scientific theories.
 - b. mathematical theories.
 - c. plant varieties.
 - d. animal varieties.
 - e. essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.
 - f. schemes, rules or methods of doing business.
 - g. schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.
 - h. schemes, rules or methods of playing games.
 - i. methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.
 - j. methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.
 - k. diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.
 - l. mere presentations of information.
 - m. computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.
2. The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

the description the claims the drawings
3. The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

 the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.
4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority  European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Mar'a Rodr'guez Nôvoa
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International Application No. PCT/US 01/08755

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 203

The subject-matter claimed in claims 1-8 falls under the provisions of Article 17(2)(a)(i) and Rule 39.1(iii), PCT, such subject-matter relating to a method of doing business.

Claims 9-20 relate to a conventional system for performing the business method of claims 1-9. Although these claims do not literally belong to the method category, they essentially claim protection for the same commercial effect as the method claims. The International Searching Authority considers that searching this subject-matter would serve no useful purpose. It is not at present apparent how the subject-matter of the present claims may be considered defensible in any subsequent examination phase in front of the EPO as International Preliminary Examining Authority with regard to the provisions of Article 33(1) PCT (novelty, inventive step); see also Guidelines B-VII, 1-6).

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.